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Construction of Islam and the Muslims in the USA: Evidence from Print Media

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Abstract

The US media features a negative rhetoric against the Muslims by posing them as a threat to the West. This article/study aims to explore how the US media constructs the image of Islam and the Muslims for the viewers. It also aims to analyze the perspective of the US writers about Islam and the Muslims. The paper analyzes 2,523 articles, descriptive of Islam and the Muslims and published in the US press from January to March 2017. It explores and describes the level to which the negative words and metaphors are used in the leading articles, which eventually constructs a negative image of the Muslims and Islam among the US citizenry. This negative portrayal by the US media points to the emergence and evolution of the patterns of representation of Islam, which are constitutive of an existential threat image. The study recommends the analysis of all media actors who speak / write about Islam and the Muslims at a broader level to understand the problem in its true perspective/essence with an aim to explore its prognostics.

Keywords: Islam, Islamophobia, Muslims, terrorism, terrorists

Introduction

Terrorism and Islam are subjects of huge concern for many, if not most, Americans and Europeans today; and certainly for most in the media. Most of it started following 9/11 tragedy, and since then there has been a continued trumpet about Islamic terrorism in the news media. Radical groups such as ISIS (or ISIL), al-Qaeda and others are dominating the news hole in the media and have increasingly become the globalized and public face of Islam. Something has gone unnoticed that popular secular minds need to know that there are over 1.6 billion souls that adhere to the Islamic faith in the world today and there are a small fraction that have become radicalized or made so, but peaceful and spiritual mainstream followers of Islam have been lumped-in with them. If the image of the Muslims is constructed as backward, untrustworthy, dangerous, and terrorist, it is for those

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mainstream Muslims too who are increasingly constructed, branded, imagined and dehumanized.[1]

Assuming the Muslims in entirety and, subsequently, posing them as responsible for terrorism creates a world of terror and insecurity in which discriminating against and attacking the Muslim minorities becomes acceptable and normal in the West.[2] Such has been the case of the Muslims in the US in post-9/11 scenario. They were victimized in thousands of hate crimes, verbal abuse and violent attacks because of their race/ethnicity or religious identity.[3] Today eighteen years have passed but the Muslim women in hijab (*nikāb*) continue to experience discrimination, and protestations erupt when Muslims attempt to build places of worship and some politicians have seen reported to call for a ban on Muslim immigrants. One common explanation for this growing antipathy is the perceived association between the Muslims and terrorism and political violence, and mass media seem to be solidifying this association in Western public consciousness. However, recent studies have pointed out that the perception of the Muslims as a political and/or cultural threat generates the feelings of insecurity among the Westerners that generalizes the fear of Islam and Muslims, what we call it today 'Islamophobia.'

The present work is focused on the study of the contemporary phenomenon of Islamophobia, which is somehow the product of how the Muslims and Islam are constructed in media.[4] Since Islamophobia is predominantly a mediated construct,[5] therefore, the study seeks to map the construction of this phenomenon through the media content. Theoretically and methodologically, this phenomenon should be studied while taking into account all complex variables at play which include the construction of negative images of the Muslims and Islam.[6] The role of media practitioners (mainly including the writers of opinion pieces and editorials) in image construction is worth studying because of the control on language which they hold and media being the mighty machinery of representations[7] give them autonomy to write against Islam and the Muslims. They

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[1]Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

[2]Todd H. Green, *Presumed Guilty: Why We Shouldn't Ask Muslims to Condemn Terrorism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), xvi.

[3]Debra L. Oswald, "Understanding Anti-Arab Reactions Post-9/11: The Role of Threats, Social Categories, and Personal Ideologies1," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 35, no. 9 (2005): 1775-99.

[4]Bouchaib Benzehaf, "Covering Islam in Western Media: From Islamic to Islamophobic Discourses," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1-11.

[5]Zafar Iqbal, *Islamophobia: History, Context and Deconstruction* (India: SAGE, 2020); Zafar Iqbal, "Islamophobia or Islamophobias: Towards Developing a Process Model," *Islamic Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 81-101.

[6]Hatem Bazian, "Islamophobia, "Clash of Civilizations," and Forging a Post-Cold War Order!," *Religions* 9, no. 9 (2018): 282.

[7]David Miller, "Media Power and Class Power: Overplaying Ideology," in *Media and Left*, ed., Savaş Çoban (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2015), 45.

construct a particular image of Islam and the Muslims by employing different writing techniques and words to generate certain emotions and feelings.

2. Literature Review

Relevant literature points out that the Muslims had been perceived as one of the greatest threats to the Western imperial ambitions and its expansionist designs for many centuries. This state, all the way back to the middle ages, continued unabatedly till the twenty-first century with apparently no end to it. For example, European powers clashed with Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century and they were expanding hitherto in the Muslim majority countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They declared war against the Muslims and on the other hand the United States also became a major imperial power focusing its economic and political control over various Middle Eastern countries. So there has been a long history of the Western empires constructing the Muslims as threatening "Others" in many ways.[8]

However, the story of construction of Islam in media as an object of fear and insecurity begins with the 1979 revolution in Iran.[9] Scholars have pointed out that the age-old Islamic threat, which laid dormant following the World War-II, again emerged with overthrow of a strategically important ally of the West - Reza Pahlevi of Iran.[10] Very quickly, the Cold War script that was divided between communism and democracy was revised to accommodate a new global conflict featuring the Muslim "Other"[11] and the world became divided between the idea of Islam and the West. One of the contemporary media researchers argues that the Iranian Revolution provided the Western media the reasons for developing the image of Islam as a new enemy based on historically hostile and polarized relationships between the Islamic world and the West.[12] Another renowned scholar describes this revolution as the initial signifier of the revival of Islam and its alleged threats to the West.[13]

A study has revealed that the revolution brought about a dramatic surge in the polemical discourse whereby media writers increasingly demonized Islam and invoked historical sources for the Christians' worry. The Western journalists frequently depicted

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[8]Green, *The Fear of Islam.*

[9]Deepa Kumar, "Framing Islam: The Resurgence of Orientalism during the Bush II Era," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 3 (2010): 254-77.

[10]Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2012); Barbara Allen Roberson, *Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[11]Karim H. Karim and Mike Gasher, "Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 27, no. 1 (2002): 99-101, https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2002v27n1a1279.

[12]Elizabeth Anne Poole, "British Islam: Media Representations and Social Meanings," (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 1999).

[13]Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

exaggerated stereotypes and caricatures of Islam, presenting it both as a hostile and baneful religion. They framed the revolution as "return to an extreme orthodoxy in Islam which is anti-Western in nature", recalling that "as recently as the beginning of the twentieth century the Mohammedan world was seen as an alien force which Christendom had every reason to fear."[14] Another study also points to media's portrayals of the revolution in Iran as the return of Islam.[15] What ultimately emerged from this discourse was an image of Islam as a potential political force threatening the Western world.[16]

Some researchers pinpointed that the coverage of Islam around 1980s and 1990s heavily relied on the 'clash of civilization' as a framework of understanding, one that the US media were all too ready to embrace after the fall of Communism.[17] A study has established the fact that the "media, the government, the geo-political strategists, and … the academic experts on Islam (were) all in concert: Islam is a threat to the Western civilization (or culture)."[18] Another analysis has revealed that the US media during and after Iranian hostage crisis (1979-1081) constructed the Muslim and Islam as negative "Other", as a part of Western outlook called 'Orientalism.' It mentioned that this was a significant event in both reinforcing the manifestations of historical ideological Orientalist discourses by which Islam came to be known to many Westerners and the point from which media' negativities towards Muslims amplified considerably.[19]

Relevant research indicates that the rise of growing tide of militant piety throughout the 1980s and 1990s which has swept through considerable portion of Middle East was at the centre of attention of media and political actors. The researchers have illuminated the fact that coverage of Islamic groups and movements, whether moderate or militants, often involved conflation of the religion of Islam with militancy in relation to violence-related activities of the militant groups. It revealed that Islamic militancy was represented with different labels such as Islamic terror, extremism, fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, and political Islam, to name a few. Likewise, Islamic terrorists, extremists, fanatics were the frames that were used for those involved in violence or deviant activities.[20] Islamic threat was generalized with the terrorism, violence and extremist pronouncements of the Muslim

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[14]Sharif M. Shuja, "Islamic Revolution in Iran and the American Media," *Pakistan Horizon* 35, no. 3 (1982): 60-66.

[15]David Zarnett, "Edward Said and the Iranian Revolution," *Democratiya* 9, no. Summer (2007): 43-53.

[16]Barbara Allen Roberson, *Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[17]Christine Ogan et al., "The Rise of Anti-Muslim Prejudice: Media and Islamophobia in Europe and the United States," *International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 1 (2014): 27-46.

[18]Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 116.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Elzain Elgambri, *Islam in the British Broadsheets: The Impact of Orientalism on Representation of Islam* (UK: Ithaca Press, 2008).

militant groups that were projected not only onto the militants or the Islamists but onto the Muslims in general. Islamists although represent a small minority of the Muslims,[21] yet the media generalized their violence as part of alleged conflict between Islam and the Western liberalism and the so-called 'political threat' that had continued to have utility in the contemporary media discourses about Islamophobia – Islamists fundamentalism and identification of Islam as a religion associated with violence and terrorism.[22] The Western journalists often projected an image of Islam as a foreign political ideology that aims at gaining political, instead of religious, advantages.[23]

In Europe, Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie as well as protests against his book *The Satanic Verses* by the Muslims became the leading stories of the 1989s. A study analyzing media coverage around the same period reveals that Western governments and the media writers all were shocked and enraged about what they saw as fundamentalist intolerance and global terrorism. It was revealed that during this ethnic conflict, the Western population and intellectuals also took part in the contemporary variant of past schism between Christianity and Islam, in which general accusations of intolerance and lack of Islam's respect for other cultural and religious values were exchanged. The study also points to the rightwing slogan, "They [Muslims] have to adapt themselves to 'our' [Western] norms and values", which became a widely shared opinion among liberals as well.[24] This conflict and its coverage played an important role in legitimation of existing biases and prejudices towards Islam and the Arabs in general and against the Muslim minorities in particular. Media contents frequently emphasized social and cultural superiority of the white and western culture and values over the Muslims.[25]

After the Gulf War of 1991, the journalists increasingly framed Islamic faith as a "fanatic and violent religion cutting-off hands", "repressing women", and presenting it hostile towards Western concept of democracy, human rights and the canons of freedom. The emergence and evolution of patterns of representations of the Muslims show that (1) Islam is associated with "politics"; (2) Islamic politics is associated with "fundamentalism"; (3); fundamentalism is associated with "terrorism"; (4) and "political

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[21]Barbara Allen Roberson, *Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[22]Elzain Elgambri, *Islam in the British Broadsheets: The Impact of Orientalism on Representation of Islam* (UK: Ithaca Press, 2008).

[23]Ihsan Yilmaz, "The Nature of Islamophobia: Some Key Features," in *Fear of Muslims?: International Perspectives on Islamophobia*, ed. Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 19-29.

[24]Teun A.Van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge, 2015), 3.

[25]Ibid.

violence" is framed avoiding its socio-political context.[26] These patterns further indicate that the Muslim women shown as victims of an alleged Islamic sexism.[27]

The typical media coverage of the Arabs and the Muslim Americans before and after the 9/11 attacks did not provide the audience with a representative image of these minority groups in the US. Media increasingly framed the activities of terrorist groups negatively and spread fear and apprehension of the Islamic terrorism and violence in the West.[28] An analysis of the British press coverage of the Muslims between 2000 and 2008 indicates that the Muslims are often associated with the terms like "terrorist, extremist, Islamist, suicide bomber and militant… fanatical, fundamentalist, extremist and militant".[29] What ultimately has emerged is the perceptions of Islamists (or fundamentalists) as political and terror threat and Islam as a cultural, ideological and global threat to security.[30]

Summarily, the review of existing literature, some of which cited above, points to the emergence and evolution of patterns of representations of Islam as a political and cultural phenomenon, which is constitutive of a threat image. While the perception of Islam as threat lies at the roots of Islamophobia. In media, this generalized fear finds manifestation in the racially and culturally charged views that distinguish between 'the self' and 'the other' and legitimize these differences as historical truth about the Westerners and the Muslim 'otherness.'[31]

3. Othering of the Muslims

Introduced by De Beauvoir in 1949, the notion of 'other' refers to the construction of an opposing ideology and thereby constructing the 'self.' It is a process of simultaneous construction of 'other/out-group' and 'self/in-group' in mutual and unequal opposition through the identification of some undesirable characteristics which 'out-group' has and 'in-group' lacks and/or desirable characteristics which the 'in-group' has while the 'out-

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[26]Kai Hafez, "The West and Islam in the Mass Media: Cornerstones for a New International Culture of Communication in the 21st Century," *Zei Discussion Papers: 2000,* C 61 (2000): 5.

[27]Laura Navarro, "Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2010): 10.

[28]Brigitte Nacos, and Oscar Torres-Reyna, *Fueling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

[29]Kerry Moore et al., "Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000-2008," *Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies* (July 2008): 3.

[30]Elizabeth Anne Poole, "Islamophobia," in *Encyclopedia of Race and Ethnic Studies,* ed. Ellis Cashmore, Michael Banton and James Jennings, 215-19 (London: Routledge, 2004); Elizabeth Anne Poole, "British Islam: Media Representations and Social Meanings," (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 1999).

[31]Iqbal, *Islamophobia: History*; Iqbal, "Islamophobia or Islamophobias."

group' lacks. This process sets up an inferior 'other' or 'out-group' in contrast with a superior 'self' or 'in-group,' but this 'inferiority/superiority' is nearly always left implicit.[32]

The process of othering goes even beyond simple blaming and denigrating 'Other'. Whether this 'Other' is an ethnic or religious or racial group, it is made rife for the exploitation, oppression and genocide by rejecting its essential humanity. Otherization often starts with an encounter between civilizations having no past tradition of contact or understanding. It may likewise take place between the groups which lived together in constant contact and communication[33] such as the Muslim and Christian communities. Both the opponent religious groups lived often as rivals, sometimes as enemies. Their perceptions and attitudes towards each other were formed and confirmed by centuries of experience but for Westerners more of fear than nothing else.[34] The normal relationships between the both are generally described as a state of hostility historically built up.[35]

Historians like Norman Daniel reports that Christians had always showed an aggressive and xenophobic attitude towards the Muslim population; they had, however, a sense of solidarity which was based on their suspicion of the perceived enemy.[36] The modern concept of Islamic 'other' and Western 'self' was increasingly crystallized by the eleventh century and as a building block, when Pope Urban II began calling for Christian crusades against the Muslim despots. The crusades propaganda was designed to construct the image of the Muslims as implacable enemies, proponents of a form of religion devised to supplant and destroy Christianity.[37]

He established the fact that the authorship of most of the intellectual propaganda employed during crusades was clerical and it covered a vast range of different degrees of power, interests, skills, abilities, and cultural levels. The main aim was that the Western Christendom wanted to establish its sense of identity.[38] The key elements of negative 'othering' discourse produced by religious leaders and polemicists around crusades primarily included the insistence that "Islam is a violent religion, promotes coercive forms of conversion, grew by the sword; is associated with heightened sexuality and perverted

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[32]Lajos L. Brons, "Othering, an Analysis," *Transcience. A Journal of Global Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 70.

[33]"The Other and Othering: A Short Introduction," Yiannis Gabriel, accessed July 12, 2019, http://www.yiannisgabriel.com/2012/09/the-other-and-othering-short.html.

[34]Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[35]Majid Khadduri, "Islam and the Modern Law of Nations," *American Journal of International Law* 50, no. 2 (1956): 358-72. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2194954.

[36]Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (UK: One world Publications Limited, 1960), 10.

[37]Norman Daniel, "Crusade Propaganda," in *A History of the Crusades: The Impact of the Crusades on Europe,* ed. H. W. Hazard and N. P. Zacour, 39-97 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press., 1989), 53.

[38]Ibid.

practices; incapable of democracy; essentially untrustworthy, and anti-scientific; the list goes on."[39]

Historical trends further indicate that concern for self-security affiliating with religion and for ethnicity/race has been oscillating from one to another. It is therefore observed that the first marker of 'otherness' was around religion; and it then transferred to ethnic/racial identity by late fifteenth century when the Christian theology located differences and distinctions between the Christians, the Jews and the Moors in blood, instead of religious ideology. Indeed, the hostility among three religions of book, as literature explains, has a long story. It has been reconfigured since the year 1492, when the Christians managed to expel the Jews and the Moors from Peninsula and with the power of ethnic/racial weapons enforced the conversion on those who wanted to stay in their dominated areas. Simultaneously, the racial configuration between Spanish, Indian, and African as resurrect began to take shape in the modern world that was divided among powerful rulers, where subjugated people were the main losers and their lost rulers.[40]

There was perhaps never a time throughout the history when the West and the East were so divided as was the period between eighteenth and early twentieth century witnessed. Through romanticized and fetishlike stories, the East was becoming all that its counterpart was not. The stereotypical construction of 'Orient' in relation to 'Occident' developed a distinct sense of 'us' [those from West] and 'them' [those from the Arabs and the near Eastern people] and resultantly places onto the Orientals the characteristics of 'otherness'. In spite of underlying diversity among colonial enterprises of different Western nations, they depicted the same behavior and produced fairly similar stereotypes of 'outsiders' – both who [like the Irish] lurked uncomfortably nearer home and those who roamed far away on the edges of the world. And, "laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity and deviance, female masculinity and male effeminacy, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality", and numerous other adjectives were attributed by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonialists to the Irish, the Indians, the Jews, the Native Americans, the Africans, the Turks and others.[41] These stereotypes created and perpetuated by the colonialists about the Muslims seem to be the continuity of the earlier prejudices and biasness towards Islam which have reemerged in the form of Islamophobia in the context of 9/11 that constructed the image of the Muslims as "radical Others" and "Orientalized Others." The word 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' were the two signs

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[39]Gary D. Bouma, "Quest for Inclusion: Australia and Islamophobia," in *Fear of Muslims?: International Perspectives on Islamophobia*, ed. Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock (Switzerland: Springer, 2016).

[40]Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[41]Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postconialism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2015), 115.

which constructed the 'Muslim Other.'[42] Therefore, to explore Islamophobia, it is also important to study the words which the media writers use to describe Islam and the Muslims.

4. Research Questions

The study examines the following research questions:

RQ-1: How do the US newspapers represent Islam and the Muslims?
RQ-2: What are the perspectives of the US media writers about Islam and the Muslims?
RQ-3: In what context, the US media generally present the Muslims?

5. Data Selection

Data for this analysis were collected through online data service provider LexisNexis by searching news contents related to two words 'Islam' and 'Muslims' for the period from January to March 2017 and comprising of regions of United States. This search provided 2,523 articles related to Islam and the Muslims from 125 US newspapers and wires.

The period of news coverage is based on the US President Donald Trump's announcements of halting the Muslim immigration to "guard against the radical Islamic terror", as these are deemed to be critical discourse moments in the news coverage. The critical discourse moments are defined as "periods that involve specific happenings, which may challenge the "established" discursive positions.". Various factors may define these key moments like political activity, scientific findings or other socially relevant events.[43]

The articles for the analysis were selected on the basis of their relevance to the scope of the study. This involved close examination of the articles, paying close attention to headlines and leading paragraphs in order to determine relevance of the article.[44] The sample of articles chosen directly reported the issues concerning Islamism (or political Islam), Islamists and the Muslims immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The focus on these critical discourse moments also enables the researcher to restrict the amount of data only to relevant text. Those articles that merely mentioned Islam or the Muslims were excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, restricting the scope and data was necessary to attain the richness of textual and contextual analysis that qualitative studies seek for in-depth analysis. This process resulted in a total of 322 articles.

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[42]Tania Saeed, *Islamophobia and Securitization: Religion, Ethnicity and the Female Voice* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 12.

[43]Anabela Carvalho, "Media (Ted) Discourse and Society: Rethinking the Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008), 166.

[44]Ibid., 166.

6. Methodology

This study investigates the construction of the Muslims and Islam through mediated communication. One of the most commonly used methods to study communication is content analysis which offers an objective and systematic examination of the discernible content of communication.[45] It is defined as a "close analysis of a work or body of communicated information to determine its meaning and account for the effect it has on its audience. Researchers classify, quantify, analyze, and evaluate the important words, concepts, symbols, and themes in a text, or set of texts, as a basis for inferences about the explicit and implicit messages it contains, the writer, the audience, and the culture and time period of which it is a part."[46]The same technique has been applied for studying media text in order to describe the trends in communication and identify the intentions and other characteristics of communicators/writers.[47]

Moreover, examining lexical items is one of the most significant components of textual analysis in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).[48] Within CDA, the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) defines five-type of representation strategies which are useful for the analysis of positive "Self" and negative "Other" presentation. DHA, however, emphasizes the importance of analyzing nomination and predication strategies or what can be described as discursive construction of persons and objects/phenomena/events. These strategies are primarily manifested in media discourse through lexical choices.[49] This study, therefore, analyzed the most frequently used words quantitatively and qualitatively.[50] This analysis of text proceeds as follows. First, a Words-Frequency-List[51] containing 150 commonly used words in articles descriptive of the Muslims and Islam was developed. Then, these words were grouped into three main evaluative categories of "positive," "neutral," and "negative" on the basis of what sentiments or emotions they tend to create among audience in order to determine the focus of the articles and tone of writing. In this study, the *negative* words refer to those that may cause the brain to feel sadness, anger or fear; for example, 'hate,' 'attack,' 'threat,' 'terrorism,' 'kill,' 'crime,' 'violence,' 'danger,' 'extremist,'

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[45]Howard C. Taylor, and Bernard Berelson, "Comprehensive Family Planning Based on Maternal/Child Health Services: A Feasibility Study for a World Program," *Studies in Family Planning* 2, no. 2 (1971): 22-54.

[46]Joan Reitz Reitz, *Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (Westport, USA: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), 173.

[47]Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis: Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences* (Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications, 1990), 9.

[48]Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage Publication, 1998), 205.

[49]Ruth Wodak, "The Semiotics of Racism: A Critical Discourse-Historical Analysis," in *Discourse, of Course: An Overview of Research in Discourse Studies*, ed. Jan Renkema, 311-26 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 95.

[50]Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis*, 9.

[51]Ibid., 9.

'bomb,' 'conflict,' 'extremism,' 'militant,' 'arson,' 'outrage,' 'assault,' 'suspect,' 'gunmen,' and 'riot'. While, the *positive* words might cause positive reaction and peacefulness; such as 'support', 'believe', 'brotherhood', 'honest,' 'nationalism,' 'cooperate,' 'peace,' 'calm,' 'community,' 'worship,' 'liberty,' 'freedom,' 'values,' 'family' and 'justice.' And, the *neutral* words do not have the ability to provoke strong emotions; such as 'world,' 'students,' 'women,' 'children,' 'recruit,' and 'academic.'

7. Findings

RQ-1:   *How do the US newspapers represent Islam and the Muslims?*

One way to infer the explicit and the implicit meanings from a group of words is to study the qualities of words for their emotional impact or how they make a person feel. It can reveal which words do the article writers use to draw out emotions and what kind of feelings do they appear to aim for.[52] The aggregate results of Words-Frequency-List containing 150 most frequently recurring words are presented in the form of table (Table-1) showing 'sentiments', 'frequency', 'percentage' and total 'words count'.

Table 1. Positive, neutral and negative words frequency: n=150

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage	Words Count
Neutral	29,383	28%	39
Positive	19,341	18%	30
Negative	57,975	54%	81
Total	106,699	100%	150

Results presented in Table-1 show that the US media writers over a period of three months featured Islam and the Muslims using 54% negative words, such as 'hate,' 'attack,' 'threat,' 'terrorism,' 'kill,' 'crime,' 'violence,' 'danger,' 'extremist,' 'bomb,' 'conflict,' 'extremism,' 'militant,' 'arson,' 'outrage,' 'assault,' 'suspect,' 'gunmen,' and 'riot.' They have used 57,975 times those words that may cause the brain to feel sadness, anger or fear. This negativity was extra used by 9,251 times compared to the words having positive/neutral connotations.

These results further indicate that 28% words found in terms of frequency of appearance do not have the ability to provoke strong emotions such as 'Students', 'Women,' 'World,' 'Children,' 'Imām,' 'Secular,' and 'Devout.' Whereas, 18% words might have positive reactions or peacefulness such as 'support,' 'believe,' 'brotherhood,' 'honest,' 'nationalism,' 'cooperate,' 'peace,' 'calm,' 'community,' 'worship,' 'liberty,' 'freedom,' 'values,' 'family' and 'justice' was very low.

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[52]Saundra K. Reynolds, "Media Representation of Islam and Muslims in Southern Appalachia," *Master's Thesis* (USA: East Tennessee State University, 2015).

The above findings reveal that the US media's negativity towards Islam surpasses optimism in the journalistic writing. The extent to which negative words depicted in the US print media to represent Islam and the Muslims have some implications on the way they are generally described. It can, therefore, be assumed that the US media become pessimistic when discussing Islam and the Muslims. The US print media increasingly represented Islam in negative way associating the Muslims with derogatory terms such as the stereotype 'Muslim terrorist' has greatly influenced the American understanding of Islam.[53]

RQ-2: *What are the perspectives of US media writers about Islam and the Muslims?*

To understand construction of the image of the Muslims and Islam in the US media, studying the type of recurring words essentially reveals the perspectives of the article writers.[54] The words-frequently-list have given a snapshot of the language used by the article writers in relation to Islam and Muslims; like, what words do they frequently use to draw out the kind of sentiments they intend to generate in the readers. Of 150 words documented in the Words-Frequency-List, table-2 lists top twenty most recurring words used by the writers.

Table 2. Top-20 words frequency: N=150

Rank	Word	Frequency	Percentage	Rank	Word	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Ban	8928	8.37	11.	Religion	2134	2.00
2.	Refugees	5056	4.74	12.	Hate	2130	2.00
3.	Muslims	4080	3.82	13.	Attack	2053	1.92
4.	Security	3111	2.92	14.	Terrorist	1917	1.80
5.	Anti	2862	2.68	15.	Support	1705	1.60
6.	World	2734	2.56	16.	Americans	1600	1.50
7.	Immigrants	2505	2.35	17.	Family	1591	1.49
8.	Students	2400	2.25	18.	Threat	1555	1.46
9.	Community	2382	2.23	19.	Women	1533	1.44
10.	White	2286	2.14	20.	Fear	1494	1.40

Table-2 indicates that US media writers most frequently used above listed top-twenty words 54,056 times which constitutes 51% of the appearance of total 150 words documented in Words-Frequency-List. Of these twenty, ten words (i.e. 29.64%) generally have negative connotations such as 'Ban', 'Refugees,' 'Security,' 'Anti,' 'Immigrants,' 'Hate,' 'Attack,' 'Terrorist,' 'Threat,' and 'Fear.' While remaining ten words (i.e. 21.03%

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[53]Neil Gotanda, "The Racialization of Islam in American Law," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637, no. 1 (2011), 185-86.

[54]Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis*; Saundra K. Reynolds, *Media Representation of Islam*.

words) generally do not suggest negative sentiments such as 'Muslims', 'World', 'Students,' 'Community,' 'White,' 'Religion,' 'Support,' 'Americans,' 'Family,' and 'Women.' These results further indicate that the US journalists and writers used 8.61% extra negative words than neutral ones (i.e. 15.71%) and positive words (i.e. 5.32%). The sentiments expressed through these top-twenty frequently used words throughout the studied articles provided a snapshot of the article writers' perspectives about Islam and the Muslims.
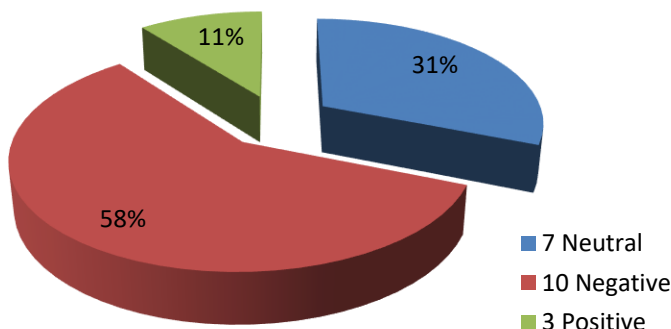

Figure 1. Sentiments by US writers

Figure-1 elaborates the article writers used 16% extra words that overwhelmingly focus on negativity about Islam and the Muslims such as 'Terrorist,' 'Threat,' 'Kill,' 'Target,' 'War,' 'Harm,' 'Ban,' 'Refugees,' 'Security,' 'Violence,' and 'Radical.' They avoided the words having positive reactions and peacefulness, for example; 'support,' 'believe,' 'brotherhood,' 'honest,' 'nationalism,' 'cooperate,' 'peace,' and 'calm.'

The above findings provide the perspectives of article writers about the religion of Islam and its followers. Investigating these trends in the media text, although it is not impossible to deduce if focus or intentions of the article writers was to incite fear, what clearly appears in their writing is a representation of terror and insecurity. It cannot be assumed that these words were disseminated aimlessly or mistakenly because negative words are intended to inspire specific feelings and over utilization of such words might cause the brain to feel sadness or fear. If Islam is most likely featured in the news articles as being a hostile religion or as a threat, it is not surprising if such negative words like 'terrorists' or 'radical' reflect these topics. If the Muslims are most likely featured as violent, bigots and alien to the Western culture, then it is not astonishing if such words having negative connotations reflect these topics.

RQ-3:   *In what context, the US - media generally present the Muslims?*

Table-2 further indicates the perception of 'Ban' appeared 8928 times in the articles under study followed by 'Security', 'Muslims' and 'Refugees' between 3000 to 5000 times. Surprisingly, the most frequent use of these words shows the US journalists and

opinion writers featured the Muslims often with reference to immigration and security related issues, for example, there are evidences from sampled data (2,523 articles from US print media) that the term 'Muslim-Ban' was used 840 times followed by 'Anti-Muslim' 724 times, 'hate crime' 461 times and 'Muslim Immigrants' 110 times whereas 'Christian Immigrant' was used 09 times and 'Jewish Immigrants' 11 times.
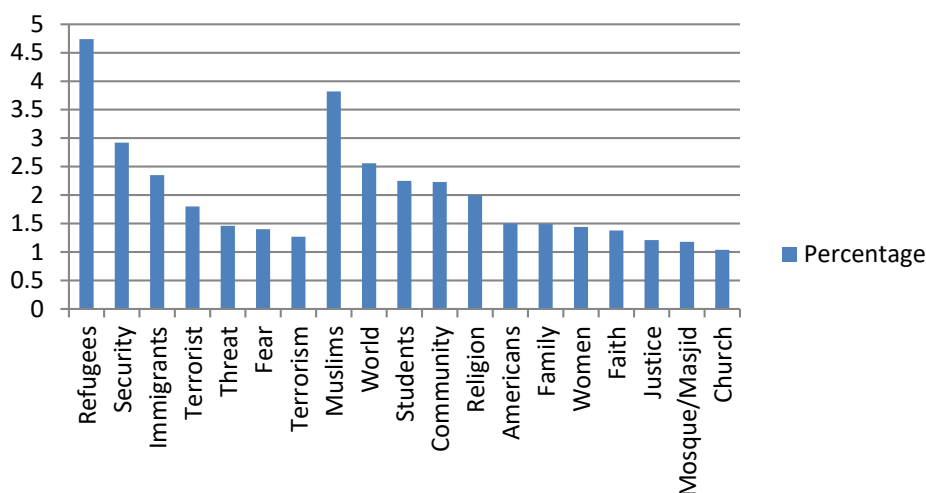

Figure 2. Commonly used nouns

The Words-Frequency-List documents a total of 95 nouns out of which 19, as elaborated in Figure-2, also suggest the immigration related issues of the Muslims were the widely discussed topics in the US print media during the period under study. Moreover, frequent use of nouns like 'terrorist,' 'threat,' and 'fear' in relation to Islam and the Muslims also indicates the likelihood of associating the Muslims with terrorism, violence and threats to the West.
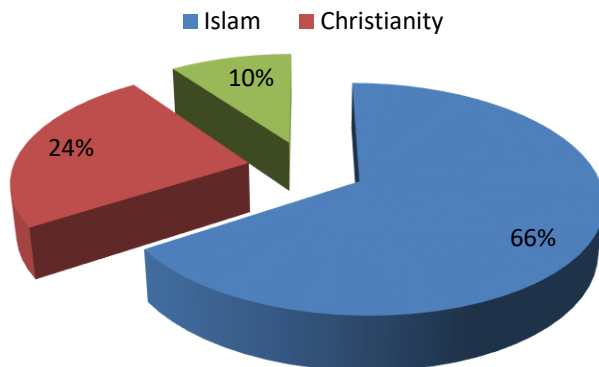

Figure 3. Discussed religions in the US articles

Figure-3 elaborates Islam is the most frequently discussed religion in the US print media, as it was referenced in the sample articles 42% higher than Christianity and 56% higher than other religions like; Judaism, Sikh, Buddhist. The subjects among the 150 words contained in the Words-Frequency-List also indicate that Islam was featured 8478 times generally with words; like, Mosque/Masjid, Islam, Sharīʻah/Sharia, Imām, Muhammad, Qurʼān/Koran, Prophet, and Ramadan.

These findings suggest that the Muslims are mostly discussed in the US media in relation to religious features; such as, 'Muhammad,' 'Qurʼān' (or Koran), 'Prophet,' 'Mosque' (or Masjid), '*Sharīʻah*' (or *Sharīʻah*'), 'Imām', and 'Ramadan.' It cannot be assumed that the article writers feature Islam in positive manner, as the previous results have already revealed their negativity about Islam and the Muslims. Out of twenty-nine adjectives in the Words-Frequency-List, sixteen most commonly used adjectives in relation to the Muslims and Islam presented in Figure-4, which also suggest that the Muslims and Islam are featured in the sample articles in negative imagery, for example, the word 'anti-Muslims' was 724 times and "radical Islam" 356 times.
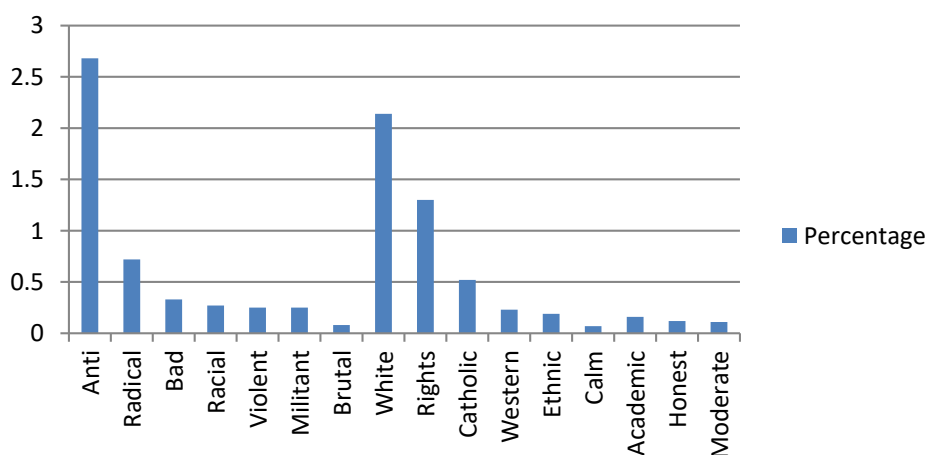

Figure 4. Commonly used adjectives

By further narrowing down the analysis apart from Words-Frequency-List, the study looked for the most commonly used phrases in the sample data in relation to Islam and the Muslims. Thirteen commonly used phrases (or adjectives) used by the US journalists and the opinion writers in articles descriptive of Islam and Muslims are shown in Figure-5.

Figure-5 reveals the hatred and negativity shown by the US journalists and the opinion writers through the use of negative words and phrases in describing Islam and Muslims. It shows that US writers most frequently refer to Islam with negative terms like 'Radical Islam' and describe the Muslims as terrorists and violent with the words like 'Radical Islamic Terrorists.' This is not to state that the US journalists and the opinion writers have used these phrases inaccurately, if Islam is most likely to feature in the US print media as

a hostile religion or threat to other religion, and if the American Muslims are most likely to feature in media in terms of violence or cultural/religious differences, then it is not surprising if such phrases used in the US media reflect these topics.
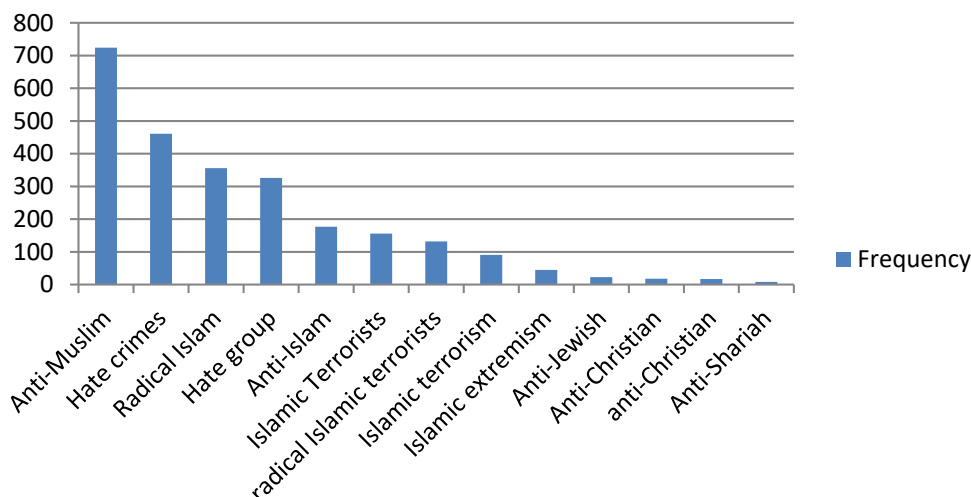

Figure 5. Commonly used phrases

On the basis of the above results presented in the form of tables and graphs, one can argue that the US media writers increasingly describe the Muslims with the words that overwhelmingly focus on negativity about Islam and often criticize the religious and cultural practices and values and also denigrate spiritual leaders of the Muslims. It can be hypothesized that the US journalists and the opinion writers are playing an important role in constructing negative image of Islam and the Muslim often associating them with derogatory terminologies that ultimately leave negative emotional leaning among the readers.

8. Discussion

The study begins with a review of the existing research on media construction of Islam and the Muslims. The reported facts revealed the emergence and evolution of patterns of representations of Islam as a political and cultural phenomena, which are constitutive of a threat image. The study then analyzed the most frequently used words in the selected articles, descriptive of Islam and Muslims, which were retrieved from LexisNexis database for the period from January to March 2017. These words were categorized into three main evaluative categories on the basis of the emotions they tend to invoke among audience in order to determine the focus of the articles and tone of writing as well as to provide a snapshot of the writers' perspectives about this religion and its people.

This analysis reveals the negative nature of the coverage of Islam and the Muslim-related topics and exposes the hostile views of the US media writers about Islam. They

expressed this hostility through the weapons of words having potential to provoke negative emotions among non-Muslims inciting them to commit acts of verbal and physical aggression against the Muslims. If Islam is most likely to feature in the media as a hostile religion or threat to other religion, and if the American Muslims are most likely to feature in media as violent, then it is not surprising if the words/phrases like 'Radical Islam,' 'terrorism,' 'extremism,' 'Radical Islamic Terrorists,' and 'extremists' reflect these topics. These words or stereotypes seem to be the continuity of earlier prejudices towards Islam which have had their historical trees to seventh century and onward.

When historical pages are turned back for a future vision, it reveals that negative words and images were the weapons in the hands of earlier polemicists such as Saint John of Damascus (675 AD – 749 or 750), who was the earliest one to use words like 'pagan cult'[55] and 'heresy' to reject the status of Islam as a religion.[56] He also called the Muslim an "arrogant soul of the enemy, the sons of Ishmael," and as a "race born of a slave" to show them anti-Christian.[57] Although he was a key historical figure, the historians describe that John has a particular relevance for the modern world in terms of his work. It is noteworthy that today the Western world is being challenged by resurgent Islam on the same way as John witnessed in his days. Connecting history and its links this challenge takes multiple forms from the movement of population to the doctrinal and cultural challenges, and as a quest for political supremacy through a growing trend of caliphate movement; like, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as Daesh.

The world that John lived in was also complex and dynamically changing. As a chain of events, the Western Roman Empire was giving way to the Eastern Empire [centered on Byzantium] which had seen periods of greatness but was facing a dangerous enemy in the form of the Muslim caliphate.[58] Some of the historians have tried to connect seventh century with the twentieth century state of so-called Islamophobia hold the view that this transition of power had profound impact on the landscape of the seventh and the eighth century's Byzantium; resulting in changes in language, culture, politics and even religion, as natives being forced and began submitting to the Muslim conquerors. They inform that the early days of the Muslim conquest, the Orthodox Christian hierarchy being the spiritual

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[55]Zafar Iqbal, "Islamophobia or Islamophobias: Towards Developing a Process Model," *Islamic Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010), 84.

[56]D. Bryan Rhodes, "John Damascene in Context: An Examination of "the Heresy of the Ishmaelites" with Special Consideration Given to the Religious, Political, and Social Contexts During the Seventh and Eighth Century Arab Conquests," (Master's Thesis: Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009): 54.

[57]Andrew Wheatcroft, *Infidels: A History of the Conflict between Christendom and Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005), 94.

[58]Daniel J. Janosik, *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publishers, 2016); Michael A. Cook, and Patricia Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: University Press Cambridge, 1977).

arm of Byzantine political power, perceived the Muslims as a unique threat to its legacy. As a historically building block, a sense of fear of Islamic expansion prevailed among the Orthodox which eventually turned them hostile towards Islam.[59]

Later, the Christian theologians and scholars in the context of crusades and other episodes like them increasingly depicted Islam initially as idolatry or ultimately as heresy, as inherited from the work of John of Damascus, in order to justify violence and aggression against the Muslims; resulting in a general perception of the Muslims as barbaric enemy of the Christendom.[60] By the eleventh century, the image of Islam was brought into sharper focus and this coincided, not coincidently, with the crusades.[61] The key constituents of the "Christian version" of Islam at that time included the notions that "violence is an essential part … of Islam" and that "Islam reverses the Christian moral concepts."[62] The Crusades propaganda proved to be a powerful body of ideas that survived even in the contemporary media discourses on Islam. The Christian negative conception of Islamic religion was integrated into the body of knowledge in which many Europeans of the middle ages found expression, in such a way as to represent the enemy as the converse of European ideal. The negative othering discourse in a way served as a tool for the expression of Europeans' pride in them and contempt for others.[63] Daniel describes the Church elders as chief proponents of medieval "cultural ethnocentrism"[64] and the medieval polemicists as the architects of prejudices[65] which survive till today.

This study finds an opinion piece which refers to the Prophet "Mohammed as a pedophile and homosexual."[66] It is a clear glimpse of the John of Damascus's era when the Prophet (*SAW*) was called "violent," "imposter," "lustful" and criticized for sexual proclivities and multiple wives.[67] In twelfth century, Peter the Venerable (1094–1156) described him an "illiterate Arab schemer and epileptic" whose rise to power was tied to "cunning, murder, and warfare" adding that whose religious statements were a façade for "seizing political power."[68] The latent message passed across was of course that Islam in its totality is a rigid progenitor of violence and is thus existential threat to the Christians.

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[59]Andrew Wheatcroft, *Infidels*, 94.

[60]Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited*,* 2010).

[61]Gary D. Bouma, "Quest for Inclusion: Australia and Islamophobia," in *Fear of Muslims?: International Perspectives on Islamophobia*, ed. Douglas Pratt, and Rachel Woodlock (Switzerland: Springer, 2016)

[62]Norman Daniel, "Crusade Propaganda," 53.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., 76.

[65]Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West.*

[66]Brian Kim, "Kim: Culture of Escalation," *The Dartmouth: Dartmouth College* (University Wire), January 31, 2017.

[67]Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[68]Ibid., 40.

Now even after eighteen hundred years the Western media are "talking about Islamic-based terror as the fierce threat to the Western societies – not Christian-based terror, or Buddhist-based terror, or terror stemming from any other religion."[69]

9. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Western media increasingly presented this religion and its people with the negative words such as terrorism, fundamentalism, extremisms, terrorists, fundamentalists, extremists, and the list goes on. These words are the attributes fitting into the historically constructed narrative that violence is an essential part of Islam and thus threat to the West and Westerners. Moreover, these negative words used by article writers, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and perpetuated through media may create a state of terror and insecurity and escalate the tension between the Muslim and non-Muslims communities in the West. It can therefore be suggested that such a remorse positioning of Islam and the Muslims and their association with violence may increase Islamophobic tendencies among non-Muslims and incite them to commit acts of verbal and physical aggressions against the Muslim minority groups.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study one can argue that a word works like a bullet fired from the lethal weapon which harms a person physically but when it is fired from the guns of media leaves collective damage to the groups or nations. So those who fire these bullets of words against Islam and the Muslims must be taken into account by the researchers studying Islamophobia. It is therefore recommended that the future researchers must examine all the actors who have presence in media and speak/write about Islam and the Muslims negatively such as the politicians, government officials, and others. In fact, this will be a good contribution by the future researchers to the subject of Islamophobia.

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[69]Cheryl K. Chumley, "Hawaii's 'Muslim Ban 2.0' fight vs. Trump Lacking in Logic," *The Washington Times*, March 9, 2017.

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